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TO A TEACHER IN THE SUNDAY SCHOOL WHO HAS A  
CLASS OF HIGH-SCHOOL PUPILS.

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By PHILIP S. MOXOM,  
Springfield, Mass.

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MY DEAR FRIEND :

Our superintendent tells me that you have accepted an advanced class in our Sunday school. I am glad to hear this, and I congratulate you on your opportunity to do a noble work, both for the boys whom you are to teach, and for the entire school of which your class is so important a part. But while I congratulate you, I am moved also to tell you that your opportunity brings to you a grave problem that will tax your judgment and powers more than, perhaps, you now realize. Our school is trying to do work that shall, as nearly as possible, equal in method and thoroughness the work done in our public schools. This is extremely difficult.

First, because long-established custom in Sunday-school teaching is opposed to careful and progressive pedagogical method. It has been the rule to think that "anyone can teach a Sunday-school class." Of course, a difference between teachers has been recognized ; but the difference has been chiefly one of personality, rather than one of equipment and method. Now, we seek to approach the scientific method of the public school, and put not less emphasis on the personality of the teacher, but more on her capacity and skill in teaching. A winning face and manner are very important, but these alone are insufficient. To relegate them to a secondary place is not easy in a work in which they have counted for so much more than knowledge and discipline.

Our new departure is difficult, second, because attendance on Sunday school is, in the main, purely voluntary, and the teacher in the Sunday school has not the same power to require attention and industry on the part of her pupils as the teacher in the public school has. This is the greater difficulty, and it is very serious, but it is not insuperable. You must not only teach where true teaching has been subordinate to entertainment and exhortation, but you must hold your pupils and draw them into voluntary coöperation with you, making them willing to work.

Let me, then, give you some suggestions which I hope will be of help to you in achieving success. Your task is not easy, but also it is

not impossible to accomplish. It has seemed to me wise, for the sake of clearness and definiteness, to put my thoughts in a somewhat formal way.

1. First of all, study your pupils. You cannot effectively deal with them all in exactly the same way. A careful grading of the school has given you pupils of as nearly equal attainments as possible. That is, differences have been reduced to a minimum. But, even then, their differences of temperament and mentality will demand of you very considerable versatility and tact. Study them individually, as well as collectively. Learn their natures and capabilities and needs, and establish with each such a personal relation as will enable you to influence them most powerfully. To do this you will need to know them in the home and on the street as well as in the school. Consider these boys your special charge, and make it a matter of daily thought how you can best reach their reason and affections, and draw them toward the end which you have set before you for them.

2. In the next place, seek to interest them in the work which is appointed them by giving them much to do. Follow closely the experimental method. Usually what you tell your boys will have less hold upon them than what you get them to learn for themselves. A Sunday-school class of your grade should be a *seminar*, as the Germans call it; that is, the work of the quarter should be so apportioned that each pupil will have a line of original work to carry on. That will interest him more effectually in real study than any amount of advice and exhortation. For example, if your general subject is the travels of St. Paul, give one boy the task of working up carefully the geography of the apostle's field. To another assign the topography, to another the zoölogy, to another the history, and to another the language of the countries in which the apostle traveled. Have one look up the social customs and another the religion of the various peoples. This is sufficient to make clear what I mean by "the experimental method." I need not dwell upon it at greater length now; but I am sure that by this method you will accomplish more than perhaps you now imagine possible. Boys like to find out things for themselves, and may be interested in almost any subject, if they are properly guided. Of course, this involves much work for you, for your class will be every week a sort of intellectual clearing-house, and in order to superintend the process properly you must gain large and constantly increasing information.

3. In following out this plan you will find it important to stimulate your pupils by manifestly expecting much of them. The more you ask, the more they will give. When a boy is roused, he likes the

hard thing rather than the easy thing; and he readily responds to appeals to a noble ambition.

4. Keep the work practical. That is, let it not terminate merely in enlarged knowledge. All real knowledge has some relation to conduct and character. Mere abstract moralizing has little value; but moral instruction that comes inductively from human experience has force and charm. It is possible, in studying the Bible, always to establish the connection of facts and truths in the present life. Indeed, by a little careful guidance your boys will quickly come to do this for themselves, so that the best moral teaching will come home to them with the force of personal conviction.

5. If you accomplish the result already indicated, you will have done a most important service to your class. But you cannot wisely or rightly rest content with this; for you are not merely a class, but a part of a school, a church, a community. Therefore, give your boys work to do that will appeal to their social instincts. Make them feel that their study is part of a large enterprise, and that this enterprise is for the betterment of life—their own and others'. It will reinforce the teaching and the investigation very greatly if in some way you knit up the class life with the beneficent life which the church is meant to embody and develop. Cultivate a class feeling that will not separate the class from the school, but rather incorporate it consciously in the school, as a company of soldiers is incorporated in a regiment. As examples of objects toward which energy may be directed, I need only mention the school itself; the work of the "boys' club" in the city; the missionary enterprise, at home and abroad, with its adventure and heroism. The main thing is to have some work that is specific and concrete which they can do. There is no really generous and helpful enterprise that may not be vitally related to the teaching, so that out of study shall come sustaining impulse to carry it on.

6. Finally, in all your teaching and guiding, steadily appeal to the highest motives. There is an element of idealism in the boy nature. In some it is stronger than it is in others, but in all there is at least a germ. Touch the noblest springs of action, and keep a bracing moral atmosphere about your class. A boy hates a prig, but he loves courage and large-mindedness; at least he may be quickly won to the love of these.

But my letter is already too long, and I will stop. Be patient, sympathetic, and constantly cheerful. Your work is difficult, but it promises great results, and you will find in it, with much perplexity and trial, also a great and rewarding joy.